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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a training course for oral skills devised for the intermediate and advanced students of the Japanese language, utilizing the media of the Wesleyan University campus broadcasting station, WESU. The training starts with correcting the students' pronunciation and pitch accent and goes to the higher level of skills, such as intonation, prominence, pause, speed and change of pace. Instructional materials consist of the educational tapes called "Classroom for Announcing," made by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation in Tokyo for training Japanese junior and senior high school students to be announcers in their school broadcasting stations. The excellent examples and drills for pronunciation and other speech skills are recorded by the professional announcers and voice actors and actresses. One of the tapes includes some actual performances of announcements and interviews by Japanese students. The teaching method is explained step by step, using these tapes. The first Japanese radio program was broadcast on December 11th, 1977. (Author/CLK)

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AN EXPERIMENT IN DEVELOPING ORAL SKILLS AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL (1)

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I would like to talk about what I have done recently at Wesleyan University for the intermediate and advanced levels of Japanese language classes. We are a small, private, liberal arts college located in Middletown, Connecticut with approximately fifteen well-motivated students studying Japanese. As part of their studies, these students study in Kyoto, Japan for one year. Upon returning to the campus they usually become East Asian Studies majors. With small classes, a closer relationship exists between teacher and students.

One of the drawbacks of our situation is our isolation, being located "in the middle of nowhere". There is a scarcity of native speakers of Japanese both on campus and in town, although we have on our staff three other instructors from Japan teaching music, and occasionally a Japanese student from Japan. And there are very few Japanese-American students on campus. Thus our students barely encounter even a limited Japanese socio-linguistic environment quite different from the situation in Hawaii, California or any big cities like New York, where numbers of Japanese reside. There are no Oriental grocery stores, or Japanese restaurants in our area. Even Japanese television programs broadcast from New York cannot be received in Middletown.

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Because of our lack of Japanese cultural surroundings, I am constantly alert to the needs of the intermediate students of spoken Japanese and continually searching for methods to enliven and make more genuine the experience of speaking good Japanese. Just as beginning conversation language tapes can and do compensate for the lack of individual personal contact, so, at the intermediate level, I find that other kinds of tapes can be useful.

I have been using Nihon Hoosoo Kyookai (NHK)(2) tapes which were made for training junior and senior high school students in Japan to be announcers in their school broadcasting stations. These tapes are entitled "Anaunsaa Kyoositu"(3) and come with a booklet which contains all the recorded materials except lengthy interviews and discussions. One part is devoted specially and thoroughly to pronunciation at a higher level of spoken ability than can be expected of beginners. The second part goes even farther, covering speech skills such as intonation, prominence, pause, speed and change of pace. Each tape includes towards the end some actual performances of announcements, interviews, etc. by Japanese students. For oral interpretation including recitation of poems there is another set of two sixty-minute tapes recorded by professional NHK announcers and radio actors and actresses.

I have found these tapes are very effective for my students at the intermediate and advanced levels. They are helpful particularly for the transfer students and those who

have learned some basic Japanese by self-study during a stay in Japan. The tapes have well-selected practice sentences which are too difficult for beginners to learn and understand. Furthermore, they have proved useful for training other students to improve their pronunciation and speech fluency, especially those who want to be undergraduate teaching assistants.

Now let me talk about my teaching methods. First I prepare a recording of each student's oral presentation. From this I prepare speech cards for each individual, jotting down comments as precisely as possible - what sounds, pitch, pause, etc. are ambiguous and incorrect. With the cards at hand they listen to their own recordings again to recognize their mistakes. Then they listen to the portion of the NHK tape appropriate to their needs, practice the examples and drills, and finally record their best readings for me to check again. It is necessary, however, to follow the sequence of the NHK tapes, namely, starting with the basic fifty sounds and proceeding through the voiced sounds, nasalization, deletion of vowels, and so on. Emphasis should be placed on vowels, stressing the presence of two vowels in a word which are not English diphthongs, distinction between long vowels and short vowels, and assimilated sounds with which practically every student seems to have difficulty.

The next step is to correct pitch accent. This is a more difficult and time-consuming task than the initial correction of individual sounds. Poor pitch accent occurs particularly with students who have acquired Kansai[(4)] accents during

one year study in Kyoto,[5] but still retain their native English accent and intonation in their speech. Actually the program I am talking about took shape when I had a student whose oral presentation in the tape was partly incomprehensible, in spite of one year study in Kyoto, Japan. Her trouble was mainly ambiguous sounds and wrong pitch accent rather than ungrammatical sentence structure. Usually if I can understand a student's speech clearly even if it shows Kansai linguistic influence, I do not correct it.

The next step concerns speech skills. Here we are dealing more with rhetorical patterns of speech rather than correct speech. A good conversationalist is not always a good reader or an excellent speaker. In this area there are at least five categories needing practice; intonation, prominence, pause, speed, and change of pace. When we analyze Japanese intonation, we find there are five patterns. First, flat or level intonation - neither rising nor falling - which is used for a monologue, reading a report, a document and so on. Second, there is the falling intonation, used for agreement, command, request, etc. Third, the rising intonation, used for getting the listener's attention, addressing, eliptic sentences, such as "Donata↑" for "Donata desu ka↑",[6] expressing the speaker's feelings, and in addition for indicating questions. Fourth, the falling-rising intonation used for emphasizing, reminding, double checking, or for signifying when a speaker does not quite

understand his or her listener's feelings, intention, etc. Examples are "Yasumi desu ke↗," and "Hee↗." (7) Fifth is the rising-falling intonation which is used for exclamatory verb ending particles such as "Naa↗↘" and "Nee↗↘." ("Siawase dawa nee↗↘", "Umakatta naa↗↘.") (8) Of these five intonation patterns three are commonly used, namely: falling, rising, and falling-rising.

In the second category, prominence is synonymous with "emphasis" and is placed on a specific word or phrase in a sentence, in order to emphasize an important meaning. It is usually evident that the important word or phrase is pronounced strongly as well as being high in pitch. This positive prominence is contrasted with passive prominence. For instance, when you positively want to interpret "fearful," you can loudly say "Kowai no yo." (9) On the contrary, you can also express dreadfulness with a weak voice pronouncing slowly "Ko-wa-i-no-yoo."

Pause is regarded as an essence of speech skills. Basically pause is necessary for taking a time for a breath. However, this time for silence is also the listener's waiting time with full anticipation and tension for what is going to happen next. Often pause appears psychologically stronger to the audience than spoken words; effective pause has the power of persuasion. The length of a pause should be adjusted to (1) the content of speech, and (2) the type of audience. If the students use a longer or shorter pause than necessary, the total effect of their speech will be much less successful. There are

more mistakes in taking short pauses rather than long ones. At the initial stage, it is convenient for the students to mark on a written speech or reading material the full, half, or quarter length pauses. Their natural flow of speech or reading should be taken into consideration. The use of half and quarter length pauses depends largely on judgement and interpretation.

Speed of speech should vary according to (1) the type and the size of the audience (i.e. children, adults, senior citizens, etc.); (2) the size of the room and (3) the difficulty of the speech or reading. Students also should pay particular attention to tempo, which in this case means the speed required by the content. It depends on the theme of the composition, its development of action, different characters, their moods, its atmosphere - sad or happy, comic or tragic, etc. As a basic rule tempo should accord to the speed of the student's oral presentation.

The last category, change of pace, is requisite when students synthesize other elements, namely, intonation, prominence, pause and speed. Whenever a topic changes or a style changes from a dialogue to description, and even from one sentence to another a change of pace occurs from intensity to relaxation in various degrees.

After being trained in these speech skills, the students are now ready to do spot announcements, to read information, to recite a poem, to tell a short folktale, or to go out for

an interview. Last semester while the intermediate students recorded their own compositions, the advanced students went for interviews with native Japanese people on campus as a final assignment. Since the advanced students learned the linguistic structure of Keigo,[10] it was a golden opportunity for them to put their knowledge to use in real interview situations.

Before taking on this assignment, the advanced students listened to the NHK tape, containing an interview by a junior high school student with a teacher on the subject of occupation. Then they listened to a similar interview by a professional NHK announcer with the same teacher on the same topic, and compared the interview formats and techniques. In addition, I had them listen to my short interviews with Japanese artists and scholars for other types of interviews. Finally the students chose a type of interview, decided on a topic, composed questions and went for fifteen minute interviews. They brought back their taped interviews to the class for evaluation and criticism.

I am planning to have students broadcast announcements and readings in Japanese over the WESU, the campus radio station. This will be our first Japanese radio program. It will be very interesting to note the response to their broadcasting as they can learn the opinions of Japanese people scattered throughout Connecticut as well as the reactions of students studying

Japanese in other colleges and universities. In the future my students could develop such challenging programs as an interview, a panel discussion, a speech contest, a recitation contest, etc. over the radio. My experiment is, of course, incomplete, but so far it has been effective and is gaining students' support. I hope that it will help lessen the drawbacks of studying Japanese at a small college "in the middle of nowhere."

FOOTNOTES

(1) This paper was read at the annual conference of the Association for the Teachers of Japanese in conjunction with the ACTFL convention in San Francisco, California, in November 26th of 1977.

(2) NHK stands for Nihon Hoosoo Kyookai (Japan National Broadcasting Corporation) which is the only national radio and television company in Japan. NHK also televises educational programs and broadcasts foreign language programs overseas.

(3) "The classroom for student announcers". These tapes and booklets can be purchased from
NHK Service Center
41-1 Udagawa-cho, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

(4) Kansai means Kyoto, Nara and Osaka (Kobe) district versus Kanto, Tokyo district. Linguistically speaking, there is a distinct dialect phonologically and in terms of vocabulary in the Kansai area, quite different from the standard Japanese in Tokyo area.

(5) Kyoto is an old capital of Japan. The students who join the Associated Kyoto Program for one year study in Japan usually live with Japanese families in Kyoto district, thus quickly learn Kansai accent.

(6) "Donata" for "Donata desu ka" ("Who?" for "Who are you?")

(7) "Yasumi desu ka." ("Is he/she really absent?" "Is the store really closed?") "Hee." ("Is that right?" "Is that so?" "Really?")

(8) "Shiawase dawa nee." ("How <u>happy</u> I am!") informal, female. "Umakatta naa." ("How <u>delicious</u> it was!") informal, male.

(9) "Kowai no yo." ("It's going to be dreadful/frightening!")

(10) Keigo means socio-linguistic usage of language of respect and humbleness, fairly well developed in the Japanese linguistic structure.